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SHOULD THE U.
FIGHT SECRET WA

Almost from th
ment the first "contra" was issued his Am
made combat boots, the Reagan Administr
secret war against Nicaragua has been embroil
vociferous if somewhat bizarre public debate
gressmen proclaim their outrage, editorialists
their misgivings, while officials in Washington
are running the war—blandly "decline to co
on intelligence matters."

Secret, or covert, wars are an honored tradi
postwar U.S. foreign policy, having enjoyed
thing of a golden age in the 1950s, when th
discreetly shuffled governments in Iran, Guat
and the Philippines. But the "controversial secret war" is a paradox peculiar to our post-Vietnam, post-Watergate democracy. At the root of the furor over Nicaragua lies a conflict that has obsessed America's public life for the last fifteen-odd years: the people's right to know versus the stated demands of national security.

Can any democracy effectively fight secret wars? Should the United States fight such wars? If so, by what moral right and in what circumstances? To consider these dilemmas, *Harper's* recently brought together intelligence officers, politicians, and diplomats who have confronted them firsthand and found them no less easy to resolve.

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